

MIDWEST AREA STANDARD OPERATING PROCEDURES MANUAL

CORRESPONDENCE

Created by
Midwest Area Council for Office Professionals
Updated 1/18/2016

CORRESPONDENCE

See www.afm.ars.usda.gov/ppweb/PDF/261-2Manual.pdf

Foreign Letters

There are numerous countries under U.S. embargo (list updated daily at <http://www.treas.gov/offices/enforcement/ofac/programs/>) to which no materials or correspondence may be sent without the permission of the Foreign Asset Control Board, U.S. Dept. of Treasury. The list of countries is updated on a daily basis.

Note on Meaning of Double-space:

Double-space – To write or type so that each line of words is followed by a line without words.
Example: This is the first line of words.

Now you have a line in-between without words. This is considered double spaced.



FORMAT OF FORMAL LETTER

(At least two lines but not more than six between letterhead and date)

(This example is for a letter signed locally by the Research Leader or the Center Director)

February 10, 2016

(Spell out the month, type the day and year in numerals)

(At least 3 lines but not more than 8 between date and address)

Dr. A. G. Bell

(Name should be no longer than 4 inches-if it is, continue on next line)

Director of Research

Correspondence Improvement Institute

(Address should be no longer than 5 lines)

Wabash Falls, Florida 32014-XXXX

(Spell out state on letter/abbreviate on envelope)

(Double space)

Dear Dr. Bell:

(Double space)

This is an example of a formal letter. This example is not all inclusive. For examples of additional optional formats, please review the General Services Administration Correspondence Manual, number 261.2. The formal letter differs from the informal memo as follows:

- a. The formal letter includes a salutation and complimentary close.
- b. The formal letter is suitable for those situations when the writer knows that the addressee would expect a more personalized letter.

Sincerely,

(Four lines)

ANDREW A. ADDRESSEE

(Signature Name No longer than 2 ½ inches)

Director

Enclosure:

(Enclosure not identified in text)

ARS Correspondence Manual

(Title No longer than 4 inches)

cc:

R. Smith, PD

C. Hanson, GSD

(Edit footer to reflect signer's location)



(Leave space for date, but do not date unless you are sure it will be signed that day.)

Dr. A. G. Bell

(No longer than 4 inches)

Director of Research

Correspondence Improvement Institute

(No longer than 5 lines)

Wabash Falls, Florida 32014-XXXX

(Double space)

Dear Dr. Bell:

(Double space)

Begin the body of the letter two lines below the salutation, block and flush with the left margin. Begin each main paragraph two lines below the last line of the preceding paragraph and flush with the left margin. Double space letters of one paragraph (10 lines or less). Single space the body of letters longer than one paragraph.

When there is a reason to break a paragraph into subparagraphs, they may be lettered and numbered as follows:

- a. Main paragraphs are typed in block style. Subparagraphs are indented using standard numbering systems. Subparagraphs are typed single spaced with double spaces between them.

(1) When a paragraph is subdivided it must have at last two subdivisions.

(a) When paragraphs are subdivided, lettered, and numbered, they fall in the following sequence: a, (1), (a), 1, a, (1), (a).

(b) When a paragraph is cited, the reference numbers and letters are written without spaces; for example, "paragraph 3a (2) (c)."

(2) A paragraph is begun near the end of the page only if there is space for two or more lines on that page. A paragraph is continued on the following page only if two or more lines can be carried over to that page.

- b. Titles or captions are used in lengthy communications to increase ease of reading and reference.
- c. The arrangement shown here may be varied to meet special requirements such as those for legal documents.

(Edit footer to reflect signer's location)

Dr. A. G. Bell

2

(Double Space)

Type the second and succeeding pages of a letter on plain bond paper the same quality as the first page. Starting with the second page, type the name of the addressee exactly as it is shown on the first page, flush left with the left margin. Type the page number on the same line flush with the right margin.

Sincerely,

(Four lines)

ANDREW A. ADDRESSEE
Director

(Signature Name No longer than 2 ½ inches)

Separate Cover:
ARS Correspondence Manual

(Always identify separate cover items)

cc:
R. Smith, PD
C. Hanson, GSD



Use Times
New Roman 12
pt. All mail to
HQ must go
through Area
Office

FORMAT OF INFORMAL MEMO

February 10, 2016

SUBJECT: Format of Informal Memo

TO: Arthur A. Addressee, Director
General Services Division

FROM: William A. Writer, Deputy Administrator
(Triple space)

This memo shows the format for preparing informal memos throughout the Agricultural Research Service. This format will expedite the preparation of correspondence and save effort, time, and materials.

- Its functional design features the use of the “SUBJECT,” “TO,” and “FROM” lines and the absence of a salutation and complimentary close.
- Most elements are blocked along the left margin. This block style minimizes the need for indented paragraphs and tabs.

Enclosure:
ARS Correspondence Manual

(Only describe enclosure if not identified in text)

cc:
C. Hanson, GSD, w/encl.

(Edit footer to reflect signer's location)

The Research Unit's Official Name
123 Address Drive • City, State 12345
Voice: 800-123-9999 • Fax: 800-294-9359 • Email: first.last@ars.usda.gov
USDA is an Equal Opportunity Provider and Employer



Left/Right
margin: 1 inch,
Top: 2 inches,
Bottom: 1.5
inches.

Use Times
New Roman 12
pt. All mail to
HQ must go
through Area
Office

FORMAT OF INFORMAL MEMO

(To be signed outside originating office)

SUBJECT: Format of the Informal Memo *(No longer than 5 inches)*

TO: Dr. Robert L. Matteri, MWA Director *(No longer than 5 inches)*

THROUGH: Janae Lentz, Personnel Assistant *(No longer than 5 inches)*
Candice Gardner, Research Leader

FROM: Mark Widrlechner, Horticulturist *(No longer than 5 inches)*
(Triple space)

Begin the body of the memo three lines below the last line of the “FROM” line flush with the left margin. Double space between paragraphs. Single space the body of informal memos longer than one paragraph. Double space informal memos shorter than 10 lines or that are only one paragraph.

If multiple people are indicated as “THROUGH,” do not type “THROUGH” for each person. List them in the order you would like your memo to progress, beginning from the bottom.

When there is a reason to break a paragraph into subparagraphs, they may be lettered and numbered as follows:

- a. Main paragraphs are typed in block style. Subparagraphs are indented .25 inches with a hanging indent of .25 inches used when two or more lines are required. Subparagraphs are single spaced with double spaces between them.

(1) When a paragraph is subdivided, it must have at least two subdivisions.

(a) When paragraphs are subdivided, lettered, and numbered, they fall in the following sequence: a, (1), (a), 1, a, (1), (a).

(b) When a paragraph is cited, the reference numbers and letters are written without spaces; for example, “paragraph 3a (2) (c).”

(Edit footer to reflect signer’s location)

(Double space)

- (2) A paragraph is begun near the end of a page only if there is space for two or more lines on that page. A paragraph is continued on the following page only if two or more lines can be carried over to that page.

For second and
subsequent pages:
Left/Right/Top/Bottom
margins: 1 inch

- (a) Titles or captions are used in lengthy communications to increase ease of reading and reference.
- (b) The arrangement shown here may be varied to meet special requirements such as those for legal documents.

Type the second and succeeding pages of a memo on plain bond paper, the same quality as the first page. Starting with the second page, type the name of the addressee exactly as it is shown on the first page, flush with the left margin. Type the page number on the same line flush with the right margin. Continue the text two lines below the name of the addressee.

(Double space)

Separate Cover:

ARS Correspondence Manual--10 copies

(Always identify separate cover items.)

(Double space)

cc:

R. Smith, PD

C. Hanson, GSD

FORMAT FOR ADDRESSING ENVELOPES

United States Department of Agriculture
Agricultural Research Service
Plant Introduction Station
Iowa State University
Ames, IA 50011

OFFICIAL BUSINESS

Dr. A. G. Bell
Director of Research
Correspondence Improvement Institute
Wabash Falls, FL 32014-XXXX

When mailing correspondence containing Personally Identifiable Information (PII), USDA policy requires that double wrap procedures be used:

1. Properly mark document and include name and address of recipient.
2. Use opaque inner envelope.
3. Cover ALL seams with tamper-resistant tape (i.e. duct, packing, or acrylic tape).
4. Affix classification markings to the inner envelope (i.e., Sensitive but Unclassified; Sensitive Security Information; or Disseminate on a Need-to-Know Basis Only).
5. Address inner envelope to the recipient by name and insert into another opaque envelope. This becomes the outer wrapping.
6. Recipient's name is optional if hand carrying, but it is required when sent via U.S. Postal Service certified or any authorized delivery service (i.e., UPS, Federal Express, or private courier).

LETTERS OF RECOMMENDATION/SUPPORT

Official title and stationery may be used to respond to a request from an individual who seeks an employment recommendation or character reference if:

- the individual being recommended is seeking Federal employment; or
- the USDA employee has dealt with the individual being recommended in the course of Federal employment; and
- the USDA employee has personal knowledge of the ability or character of the individual making the request.

Official title and stationery may be used to write a letter recommending:

- an individual seeking to work for USDA or another Government agency;
- USDA colleagues who are U.S. citizens; and
- USDA colleagues who are not U.S. citizens only if the USDA employee represents his or her own views, i.e., personal opinion of the value and credentials of a foreign scientist.

Official title and stationery may not be used to write a letter recommending:

- a personal friend;
- a relative;
- a person who is applying to a potential non-Federal employer if the supervisor determines that responding to such a request is not part of the USDA employee's official duties; and
- a grant applicant in support of a grant application to the USDA or another Federal agency.

NOTE: Such a letter may violate the anti-representation statutes. USDA employees may write representing their own opinions regarding an applicant if they are personally familiar with the applicant. USDA employees must write on personal stationery and send the letter directly to the applicant (not to the proposed funding source). USDA employees may not urge any actions (e.g., funding) nor make any statements regarding the proposed application (e.g., encourage support). Writing even this type of personal letter may not be appropriate for extramural staff.

Ethics Office with additional scenarios for recommendation letters:

<http://www.ethics.usda.gov/docs/Letters%20of%20Recommendation%20Collaboration%20Support%20Etc%20.pdf>

Letter of Recommendation for Organization with Which You Have Cooperated or Held a Contract

Employees may provide a factual letter that simply verifies that a contract between, or project involving, the grant-requesting organization and the agency has been completed and the Organization accomplished its required actions under the terms of the contract or project in a successful manner. However, in order to avoid accusations of favoritism, agencies choosing to issue these types of letters must be prepared to issue such letters in response to every request.

EXAMPLE: Prior to coming to USDA, an employee taught at a university. A former student has just graduated and is seeking a job with the university. The former student asks for a letter of recommendation from the USDA employee. The USDA employee may NOT write such a letter on official stationery with official title. The former student is not seeking Federal employment nor has the USDA employee dealt with the former student in the course of Federal employment.

What if during the time the employee is at USDA, the student worked with the employee to edit a manuscript? In this case, assuming the employee worked on the manuscript as part of their official duties, the employee may write a letter recommending the student and may use official stationery and the USDA employee's official title because the USDA employee has dealt with the student during the course of Federal employment.

EXAMPLE: A Center Director is asked to write a letter recommending a colleague for a fellowship. The Director can do so and use official stationery and official title only if the Director dealt with the colleague in the course of Federal employment and the fellowship is from a private (non-Federal) source.

We are not allowed to write a letter recommending a contractor, vendor, or supplier of goods or services. This raises issues of endorsement and preferential treatment by the USDA. Such letters are used by these entities to advertise and promote their products and services and to obtain future business. USDA employees may write about a contractor's progress/performance in the course of an official evaluation of the contract, but may not recommend that others use the vendor's services or good.

EXAMPLE: A contracting officer attends a course on procurement integrity. USDA contracted for the course with Management Concepts, Inc. The contracting officer really enjoyed the course. The contracting officer may write a letter recommending the course on personal stationery and sign her name "Mary Smith". She may only refer to her USDA position as one of several biographical details in the body of her personal letter and make it clear that she is writing in her personal capacity. For example, she may say "As a government contracting officer, I found the course very accurate and presented in a useable manner." This gives Mary Smith the credibility to make the recommendation without endorsing the course officially.

Tenure Recommendations

Given that the granting of tenure falls within the internal business of the University and given the importance which tenure status has upon the financial interests of the candidate and the University, Agency managers should presume that the University, in asking the employee to participate in its tenure deliberations, seeks the employee's involvement in his or her official capacity and the Agency manager must then ensure that any such involvement be limited in a manner that best protects the interests of the Federal Government. An employee may not participate in internal University deliberations or decisions concerning tenure, including serving as a member of a tenure committee.

When authorized in advance by the Agency, an employee may provide the University with an appropriate statement concerning that employee's evaluation of the professional qualifications of a University tenure candidate. Factors to consider in determining whether an evaluation is appropriate may include the following:

- The University sends a request to the Agency for the employee's statement;
- The employee's statement expresses a factual evaluation of the candidate's credentials based on official collaborations;
- The evaluation would be based upon observations that the Agency employee made during his or her official duties as a Federal employee; and
- The statement avoids language making a tenure recommendation.

USDA employees may not write letters of reference/recommendation to (or for submission to) another federal agency in support of a Visa or Green Card application.

Letters of reference/recommendation may not be written by USDA employees to, or for submission to, another federal agency in support of Visa or Green Card applications, but may be written on USDA letterhead for any individual who applies for federal employment.

EXAMPLE: You are requested (by an individual, by his/her attorney, or by an institution) to write a letter that you or the requestor will send to the Department of Homeland Security, United States Citizenship and Immigration Services (DHS-USCIS), or other federal agency supporting a petition for a visa, extension, or green card.

Not allowed: You cannot send a letter of recommendation or support on behalf of another individual to or for submission to any government agency, whether on USDA letterhead, or on plain stationery.

Why: A criminal statute, 18 USC § 205, prohibits a federal employee from making representations on behalf of another before or to a federal entity (except in relation to federal employment).

EXAMPLE: The DHS-USCIS or Department of State (DOS) contacts you to obtain information about the qualities and qualifications of a current or former postdoctoral employee in your USDA location.

Allowed: You may write such a letter on USDA letterhead in response to such a written request from another government agency. Your response should be reviewed through the appropriate supervisory chain.

Why: The request is made officially from one government agency to another, and would be transmitted by as an official USDA communication. The statute does not prohibit official, agency cooperation and communication.

For additional information, contact the Area Ethics Officer through proper channels.